ITT Just One Hot Topic of

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SANTIAGO, Chile, March 25 — Columnist Jack Anderson's revelations about ITT's alleged involvement in Chilean affairs have had a greater impact here than in Washington, but it was only the biggest current controversy in a country where seemingly trivial material can be turned into a national issue.

Other debates raging this week dealt with such mundane matters as a fish called merluza (a kind of cod); the kind of oil being used in paint; and even baby bottle nipples.

In Chile, nearly all issues are debated along ideological lines, with the Marxist parties that form the political base of President Salvador Allende on one side and the conservative economic interests that often ruled in the past on the other end.

Natural Issue

The Anderson issue was a natural for the Marxist press, which has always laid the ills of Chile to the allegedly interlocking interests of foreign capital, the CIA and the local oligarchy. When Anderson indicated that International Telephone and Telegraph and the CIA had conspired to prevent Allende from assuming the presidency in 1970, the columnist became an instant hero.

The Communist Party daily El Siglo, which rarely has a kind word for anything made in U.S.A., described Anderson as "in the best democratic tradition of North American journalism."

The Socialist Ultima Hora, however, looked beyond the sensational revelations to perceive a current plot involving the usual interests and manifested in daily economic and political events. Thus, said writer Alejandro Bell Jara, one point in a conspiracy to bring down Allende now, is: "Publication in the most reactionary daily in the United States, The Washington Post," of the Anderson articles on the events of 1970.

Story Ignored

The official voice of the conservative opposition, Mercurio, virtually ignored the Anderson story in the beginning. The first dispatch it carried was ITT's denial from New York of the allegations, which themselves had not been printed in Mercurio.

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Only today did the story make page one, in an account that described Anderson as "printing whatever rumor or scandal reaches his ears." Mercurio also recalled that Anderson attacked Chilean Felipe Herrera in 1969 for alleged irregularities in the Inter-American Development Bank that he then headed. Herrera is now Allende's candidate for rector of the National University.

Mercurio suggested that Anderson was in the pay of people besides those who buy his column. Indeed, the question most put to this reporter by Chileans — perhaps reflecting their own national debates — was, "Whose interests is Anderson serving"

But the merluza fish (Hake in English), paint oil and nipples issues better reflect usual debate here. All have to do with economic problems, the usual cause of political uproar.

Chileans eat much more beef than they raise, and the cost of imports from Argentina is a worry. Allende's regime asked the Soviet Union to help by supplying a couple of floating fish factories to bring ashore enough fish to cut meat consumption.

But the chonic problems of fish distribution were not immediately solved. The giant Soviet ships deposited tons of frozen fish on the docks, nad there was no way to get it to market.

As the sun rose over the mound of skinned hake, Mercurio smelled an issue. It commenced a campaign suggesting that the hake—which had always been considered a fish of the lower classes here anyway — had been packaged by the Russians in a manner prejudicial to the health of the eater.

The government, by this time getting the fish out into the worker neighborhoods, retaliated with block parties featuring free hake, daily recipes in the Marxist press for hake delights, and testimonials of cabinet ministers to its flavor.

Mercurio then interviewed humble Chilean fishermen who said the Russians not only ruined their trade but ripped up their nets with their fish factory ships.

The evening edition of Mercurio retouched a photo of Economics Minister Pedro Vuskovic, mainstay of

Debate in Chile

the effort to keep hake afloat to show him dining on fish heads at a state banquet.

Most such issues are eventually debated to death, rather than solved, and that seems the probable fate of the fish story.

Vuskovic was also a target in the paint-oil caper. He is pushing another campaign to expose firms that hold goods off the market to create shortages and forcing up prices.

His investigators found a private factory that was using edible oil, a scarce item, to make paint. With Vuskovic on the scene, the government took over management of the company and exposed the owners as enemies of the people.

But, again at the relentless prodding of Mercurio, it developed that a tire factory already taken over by the state was using edible oil industrially.

De-nationalized Plant

Allende ordered the plant returned to its owners, who happen to be mostly Germans. The most Machiavelian version of the story is that Vuskovic, a hardliner in the cabinet, would like to see Chile's debt renegotiation talks in Paris collapse and had seized the plant to alienate German bankers. But most sources consulted thought that was a red hake.

Finally there was the baby-bottle nipple scandal. The rubber nipples keep turning up in an irrigation canal, over 50,000 of them by government count, a dozen or so if one believes the opposition.

In outraged headlines it is alleged that unidentified commercial plotters were dumping the nipples, an item of prime necessity for the people, to cause econimic chaos and disinchantment with the government.

Sometimes the debate is directly between Allende and Mercurio, which is owned by the family of Agustin Edwards, who left Chile for a job in the United States after Allende was elected.

Allende attacked Edwards and Mercurio last night at a conference of industrialists. At the end of the speech, a defender of Edwards stood up to contest the president.

Allende replied: "You stick with the philosophy of senor Agustin Edwards, and I will stick with the ethics of the people."